

Sir Keith Park Memorial Airfield Inc.

Newsletter – September 2024 - #13



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HEADLINES:

President Geoff Furkert flew to London to attend the unveiling Monday 9th September at the RAF Club, Piccadilly, of new portraits of ACM Lord Dowding and ACM Sir Keith Park;

Thames Battle of Britain Commemorations were held 11:00am Sunday 15th September;

Waxes from which the statue of ACM Sir Keith Park will be cast have been despatched to the foundry.

SIGNIFICANT RECOGNITION FOR NEW ZEALAND & SIR KEITH PARK:

British pomp and ceremony . . !!

Crisp RAF uniforms, crisp uniforms from other services, other representatives, lots of medals and lots of gold braid! (“fruit salad” and “scrambled eggs”)

The unveiling at the RAF Club, Piccadilly on Monday 9th September of two new portraits: one of ACM Lord Dowding and one of ACM Sir Keith Park, now hanging one either side of the existing portrait of Sir Winston Churchill in the Churchill Bar at the Club. A fitting tribute to these two auspicious gentlemen !!

What a prestigious occasion – some 84 years in the making. A huge recognition for New Zealand and for Sir Keith.

I was invited to attend the unveiling, which resulted in a lightning return to the UK for two days in London, then back for the Thames Battle of Britain Commemorations on Sunday 15th September!! It may have been my comments to the RAF Club Management this time last year which initiated this recognition – who can be sure!

The unveiling was an amazing networking opportunity for me, and one where I was able to promote, not only Sir Keith and his wide-ranging achievements, but also our Memorial project here in Thames.

The unveiling duties were performed by the current Lord Dowding (Lord Piers Hugh Tremeneheere Dowding, 3rd Baron Dowding). After first unveiling his grandfather's painting, he moved across to the portrait of Sir Keith, whereupon he called on Sarah Mossman (daughter of Lesley Park) to join him. A wonderful and sensitive touch!



AC Rick Peacock-Edwards
RAF Club Event Organiser



Hazell Morgan
Portrait Painter



Lord Dowding
Unveiling grandfather



Lord Dowding III & Sarah Mossman with Sir Keith



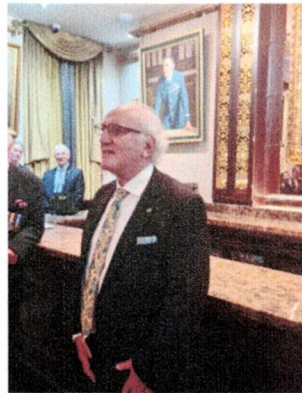
Me, Hazell (Painter) & Sarah Mossman



High Commissioner HE Phil Goff & Sarah Mossman



High Commissioner HE Phil Goff & Sarah & Hazell



Lord Dowding III



President RAF Club

Some of the people whom I met and talked with included: New Zealand High Commissioner HE Phil Goff, WgCdr Mark Waters (New Zealand Defence Advisor to the UK), Gail Romano (Curator, War History, Auckland Museum), Air Commodore Rick Peacock-Edwards (RAF Club event organiser), Hazell Morgan (artist for the portraits) and her husband Stephen, current AOC 11 Group Air Vice-Marshal Tom Burke, Sarah Mossman, Keith Skilling and Bobby, and many, many others.

Following the main unveiling event, I joined Air Vice-Marshal Tom Burke and a few RAF/ex-RAF friends in the Running Horse Tavern at the Club. A very pleasant, informal gathering.

After that, I was invited to a private dinner in the Dining Room, hosted by London philanthropist and property magnate – Alastair Kerr. The dinner was in intimate affair with about 30 guests, an occasion where I was able to speak about our project and efforts to gain greater and more appropriate recognition for Sir Keith.

My comments were well received and some interesting networking connections kindled. I believe that my new association with Alastair will be mutually beneficial.

This quick trip to London is something that I would not have wanted to miss. I wasn't totally sure what I was going to as I left New Zealand, but, looking back, the journey exceeded my wildest expectations! Not to have been missed for quids . . . !!

NOTE: No donations to the SKP Memorial project were applied to my trip to London. All my travel expenses were paid for by me, personally.

THAMES BATTLE OF BRITAIN COMMEMORATIONS:

I cannot add much to the great local publicity that the recent Battle of Britain Commemorations attracted last week. The two articles, with photos, are attached:

- Mercury Bay Informer, 17th September 2024 2 pages;
- Valley Profile, 18th September 2024 1 page.

However, the commemorations next year Sunday 14th September 2025 are planned to be a grander event as there will be a statue to inaugurate. Watch this space!

THE BRONZE STATUE:

Joanne has now despatched the waxes for the 2.3m bronze statue of Sir Keith to the foundry. This means that the fully finished, completed statue will arrive back in New Zealand in March next year.

KYLIE'S MURAL PORTRAIT:

Kylie's mural portrait of Sir Keith was completed mid-August and erection on the Hauraki Aero Club Hangar completed in two days by 13th August, including the flood lighting at night.

This was an immediate success, as highlighted by the social media postings which started the next day.

Even at my visit to the RAF Club (see above) New Zealand High Commissioner HE Phil Goff was aware of this mural before I even raised the matter, and was euphoric in his praise. Others at this event, when shown pictures of Kylie's work, were similarly impressed.

I can't thank Kylie enough for her efforts, skill and passion for undertaking this work.



Kylie Gunn and Geoff Furkert stand alongside the new six metre tall mural of Sir Keith Park. Photo: ALICE PARMINTER

FUNDRAISING:

Although sufficient funds have been raised to ensure that we will have a bronze statue of Sir Keith Park to inaugurate next year, funds in the order of \$35,000 are still needed to get the memorial project to the finish line.

Please help with a donation – to whatever extent you can.
The banking details are noted below.

Geoff Furkert

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Bank Account Name:	Sir Keith Park Memorial Airfield Inc.
Bank Account Number:	38 9022 0151185 – 00
Charitable Registration:	CC60152

BATTLE OF BRITAIN COMMEMORATION IN THAMES



Attending the commemoration was Hon. Scott Simpson, RNZAF Capt Mike Cannon, Mayor Len Salt, Thames air cadets, Capt (Retired) Russell Skeet, Geoff Furkert, Rev Brendon Wilkinson. Standing in front of the Sir Keith Park Memorial are Geoff Furkert, Capt Mike Cannon, Lesley Park and RN Commander Richard Greenwood-Bell.

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Two special guests present were the grand niece of Sir Keith Park – Lesley Park, and Joanne Sullivan, who is the commissioned sculptor of a two-metre statue of Sir Keith which will finally be completed once sufficient is found.

Captain Russell Skeet (retired), the Master of Ceremonies, introduced the dignitaries and led people through the different aspects of the ceremony.

The Kerepehi Brass Band whose repertoire of battle hymns and music that has held past generations together, was top class. Its music during the event was very moving and then after the ceremony, it was terrific, good-time listening. Our CEO of TCDC, Aileen Lawrie, is a



Photo credit: Wayne Martin

of Britain commemorations have a very significant personal dimension of Sir Keith Park and let's not forget the large number of fighter pilots who were kiwis and fought in the Battle of Britain. Some paid the ultimate price.

musician in the Kerepehi Brass Band.

It was a formal even sombre event – a time to remember the sacrifices of those who have fought for freedom and to say thank you. For Thames and New Zealand, the Battle

An auspicious event commemorated



The event was The Battle of Britain, commemorated every year as near to 10 September as possible. Approximately 170 people came to the Thames commemoration, including our Mayor Len Salt, our MP Scott Simpson, Thames Community Board Chair, Adrian Catran, Royal New Zealand Airforce Base Commander, Captain Mike Cannon, Royal Navy Commander Richard Greenwood-Bell, 28 Airforce cadets and a large contingent of the community from Thames.

The day before, the event had to be moved from the Thames Airfield (Sir Keith Park Memorial Airfield) to the Thames Sailing Club due to planes occupying the large hangar there.



Young people in the Kerepehi Brass Band and from the Thames Air Cadets participated in the commemoration.

Photo credit
Wayne Martin

servedly, protect London.

His ability to think and effect a plan in terms of overcoming the enemy, gave the Royal Airforce fighters victory and saved Britain from a loss that was critical for the whole War. It set a platform for optimism and the determination to gain overall eventual victory over the Nazi onslaught.

The freedom fought and won in the Battle of Britain is directly connected to the freedom we experience today. Essentially it restored the hope for and commitment to freedom that is the framework for our society. However faulty it is, the freedom we take for granted in New Zealand is related to the actions and leadership of Sir Keith Park.

The organiser of the commemoration, local resident Geoff Furkert, spoke of the particular contribution of Sir Keith Park, not only in the Battle of Britain but in the rest of World War II, and also of his enormous service to New Zealand life, after the war.

Geoff has personally led the drive to have suitable recognition for Sir Keith who has largely gone unrecognised in his own country. Our community leaders and the Airforce and navy officers added to his message each striking a chord of connecting our past to the current challenges in the way we live, to make a difference to our society. **Continued on page 9**

homeland and winning many an air battle against the lesser resourced British Airforce. London was particularly suffering. Pilots from New Zealand and Australia had signed up with the Royal Airforce. One of this small team, though not the most senior, was a quiet and unassuming officer and pilot by the name of Keith Park. His strategic attack and defence plan and his outstanding leadership by example, was to put a stop to Nazi victory over the skies of London.

KEITH PARK WAS A NEW ZEALANDER FROM THAMES

Keith was the Commander in Chief of 11 Group, the most important Group in Fighter Command. This group had to not only protect the southern coastline of Britain and Southeast England from enemy attack, but to unre-

The Battle of Britain sounds like a far-off and far-away historic event. It is. This momentous battle occurred 84 years ago in the early stages of World War II in England. The German Luftwaffe (Airforce) attacks on the city of London and other parts of England were striking at the jugular of British existence. Hitler had planned to invade Britain by the use of the German navy and army once the Luftwaffe had victory over the skies of England and had caused sufficient carnage to render London defenceless. The English Channel had become a mere hop for the Nazi invasion.

There was a small team (Airforce and ground defence), leading the defence of Britain, urgently devising a strategy to overcome this well-resourced German Airforce which was ruthlessly attacking the British

Commemorations by the sea

By ALICE PARMINTER, Public Interest Journalism funded by NZ On Air

The annual commemoration of the Battle of Britain was held at Thames Sailing Club in Taranu on September 15.

The event was to honour Thames-born Sir Keith Park and others who fought in the Battle of Britain 84 years ago during World War II. Sir Keith's grand-niece, Lesley Park, was present for the event, along with sculptor Joanne Sullivan, who was commissioned to create a bronze statue of Sir Keith for display at Thames Airfield.

The attendees heard from the Royal Navy Commander Richard Greenwood-Bell representing the British High Commission, Royal NZ Air Force Group Captain Mike Cannon, retired Captain Rus-

sell Skeet, and Sir Keith Park Memorial Airfield trust chair Geoff Furkert, along with Thames Coromandel Mayor Len Salt and Coromandel MP Scott Simpson.

Commander Greenwood-Bell said Sir Keith was more often remembered in the United Kingdom for his leadership qualities, rather than his role as an unsung hero of the battle.

"He intuitively understood that leaders must be seen... to be prepared to do what they asked others to do," he said.

Group Captain Cannon agreed, saying he thought Sir Keith was an example of a man who should be held up as a role model for the next generation.



Cadets stand to attention as the retreat is sounded.

Photos: ALICE PARMINTER



RN Commander Richard Greenwood-Bell from the British High Commission, front, with retired Captain Russell Skeet, who led the proceedings.



Royal NZ Air Force Group Captain Mike Cannon.



Geoff Furkert speaks to the crowd.



The Thames Air Cadets flank the room for the ceremony.